

# Quality Review Visit

## **Survival Guide for Lead Student Representatives**



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This guidance has been written to provide lead student representatives (LSRs) with information about the Quality Review Visit method, part of the revised operating model for quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland from 2016-17. The guidance provides an overview of the review process, including specific guidance about the role of the LSR. Students are one of the main beneficiaries of the Quality Review Visit, thus the role of LSR is a very important one.

## How to use this guidance

We encourage you to first watch the [What is Student Engagement?](#) video, which is available on the QAA YouTube channel, to give you a sense of the LSR role. We then recommend reading this guidance in full. It has been designed with students in mind, so we hope you'll find it useful. You should, however, remember that the definitive manual is the [Quality Review Visit Handbook](#), which should always be taken as the ultimate authority for how reviews will be carried out. Within this guidance we've focused on your role as an LSR. We've also included tips from LSRs who have been through a QAA review before - they share their ideas and best practice so you can learn from them.

We've split this guidance into three sections:

- a. Before the on-site visit
- b. The on-site visit
- c. After the on-site visit

Each section contains a checklist so that you know exactly what to do and when. All the key terms are also available in the 'ultimate jargon buster' section at the back of this guidance for easy reference - it may look like a foreign language at times, so we've tried to simplify it.

This guide might not be the lightest read, but it's pretty crucial if you want to do a good job as LSR. We think that you will find the role rewarding, and you never know, you might enjoy it - happy reading!

## Who are QAA?

All universities and colleges that provide higher education in the UK are independent. However, most receive government funding in one form or another.

QAA is an organisation that is independent of both government and of colleges and universities. We visit colleges and universities to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities for the quality and standards of the higher education they provide.

When we talk about quality and standards, we aren't talking about your exam results, or what the sports facilities or student accommodation are like. Standards and quality in this sense mean things such as the level that you are being taught at, the feedback on your work, student support with personal tutors, how the student voice is listened to, and information published about your course. Check out the jargon buster in Annex 1 for more information.

## What is Quality Review Visit?

Quality Review Visit is part of the funding bodies' – in this case the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DfENI) – new operating model for quality assessment of higher education.

Specifically, Quality Review Visit is part of the new Gateway process, which is made up of a number of checks on colleges that wish to enter the publicly funded higher education system. In order to become 'established', colleges that are new to the publicly funded higher education system will need to show that they meet certain requirements (the baseline regulatory requirements).

These new colleges will receive a Quality Review Visit before they are allowed to enter the publicly funded higher education system. Only if the review is successful, and the relevant funding bodies' other checks are positive, will they be allowed to enter the system. They will then enter a developmental period and have a further Quality Review Visit in four years' time. Following a successful quality judgement at the end of the developmental period, they will become 'established' and will be scrutinised less intensively (although the funding bodies will still monitor them and intervene where necessary).

Additionally, any college or university that is already considered 'established' may be referred to the process if there is evidence of a sufficiently serious problem.

As the higher education system transitions to this new quality assessment model, universities and colleges, which were scheduled for QAA Higher Education Review (HER), and which have not already had two or more successful reviews by QAA in the past, will also receive a Quality Review Visit.

# What does a review look like?

You'll find out about the review process in detail at the review briefing and by reading the method handbook, however, in a nutshell, the main bulk of the review work can be divided into the following three stages.

## **a. Before the on-site visit**

The funding bodies notify QAA of the colleges and universities to be reviewed in the next year, and QAA contacts the colleges and universities to arrange their review.

QAA carries out an initial assessment of each of the colleges and universities due for review, using existing data and information, and works out how long the review visit should last, how many people should be on the review team and whether the college or university needs a one-to-one briefing on Quality Review Visit, or whether they will have a virtual session.

All the colleges and universities will then have these details confirmed to them. The college or university informs QAA who the lead contact at the college or university is for the review process (the Facilitator) and who their LSR is.

The colleges and universities will all then attend a briefing event led by QAA to find out more about the process, which you (the LSR) will be invited to by your college or university.

Your college or university will be working hard to bring together evidence and documents to show how they meet the baseline requirements. This evidence can be anything from minutes of meetings, to examples of reports, to survey data.

After gathering all the evidence, your college or university will bring it together into the provider submission. This, along with your student submission, will be sent to the review team, who will look at this before they visit your college or university. Please take the time to watch our [guidance video](#) in advance of the briefing.

## **b. The on-site visit**

The on-site visit will normally last two days, but can be longer or shorter depending on what was decided by QAA during the initial assessment. The review team will visit your college or university to have meetings with staff and students, and look in more detail at what was presented to them in the provider submission and student submission. They use all the information provided to reach rounded judgements about the quality and standards of higher education provision being delivered. During the review visit the review team may want to meet with the Facilitator and you (the LSR) from time to time. You may wish to consider sharing the role if you think you might have limited availability over the two or three days of the visit.

## **c. After the on-site visit**

Once it has finished the visit, the review team will write a report to present its findings and the rounded judgements. This will be sent to your college or university to check for factual accuracy, and then the report will be sent to the funding bodies, who will use it to make a broader decision about your college or university. If the report is negative, your college or university will also have the opportunity to appeal the decisions before the report is sent to the relevant funding body.

Once the report is published, this stage may also include follow-up and action planning as detailed on page 21 of the Handbook.



## Chapter 2: Some key definitions

We won't beat about the bush, it's not all sunshine and buttercups – there are some key definitions it's worth getting your head around. Not just because you'll need to be familiar with them for the review, but also because you'll need to explain what they mean to students.

6 When I first became an LSR, everyone spoke in this jargon of phrases like 'academic standards' and 'quality' at the briefing event and in the handbook. I had no idea what they meant! Don't worry, because QAA give you a jargon buster so you can keep up. It did make me realise though that it is part of my job as LSR to translate all these phrases for students. So in the student submission I didn't talk about 'learning opportunities' but instead about library facilities, online access and personal tutors. It really isn't as daunting as it first seems!

Interview with Samantha Gill, LSR, in 2012

Here goes:

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### Academic standards

Standards/Threshold standards

The threshold standards are the minimum level of achievement that a student has to achieve to be eligible for an academic award (such as a bachelor's degree). These are described in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). For example, this means that an engineering degree from one university reaches the same minimum level as it does in another university.

Academic standards are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain a specific academic qualification, which are set by the degree awarding body (such as a university). The academic standards they set for their qualifications may exceed the threshold standards.

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### Learning opportunities

Learning opportunities are everything a university or college provides in order to enable a student to achieve the level required to qualify for an award.

Learning opportunities include:

- the teaching that students receive on their courses or programmes of study
- the contribution students make to their own learning
- the academic and personal support students receive that enables them to progress through their courses
- access to libraries
- access to online resources or a virtual learning environment.

Learning opportunities is one of the judgement areas in QAA Review.

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<b>Academic Quality</b> Quality	<p>Academic quality is about how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable a student to achieve the level required. A college or university should be able to guarantee the quality of the learning opportunities it provides, although it can't guarantee any particular student's experience of these.</p>
<b>Student academic experience</b>	<p>This refers to the learning experience of the students and how they are supported to progress and succeed. It includes the reliability of information published about what a student should expect of their learning experience.</p>
<b>Information</b> Information about learning opportunities	<p>This is information about learning opportunities being available and accurate. This information is mostly for the public but includes current students, graduates and those responsible for quality assurance.</p>
<b>Transnational education</b> TNE	<p>Transnational education, or TNE, refers to education that is delivered in a country that is different to where the awarding institution is based. For example, if a Greek college delivers qualifications awarded by an English college, in agreement with that college, or if a British university has a campus in Singapore.</p> <p>Quality Review Visit looks at all programmes a college or university offers, even those delivered overseas. If your college has any TNE programmes you should aim to get input from students on those programmes for your student submission.</p>
<b>The baseline regulatory requirements</b> The baseline requirements	<p>These are the areas considered within the Gateway process before a decision is reached about the college or university. The following elements make up the baseline regulatory requirements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i></li> <li>2. The Expectations of the Quality Code</li> <li>3. The relevant code of governance</li> <li>4. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met</li> <li>5. Student protection measures</li> <li>6. Financial sustainability, management and governance</li> <li>7. The college or university's mission and strategy</li> </ol> <p>QAA will look at elements 1-5 as part of the Quality Review Visit, and the relevant funding body will separately look at elements 6-7.</p> <p>Further guidance can be found at: <a href="http://www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment/">www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment/</a>.</p>
<b><i>The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i></b> FHEQ	<p>A formal structure that identifies the national higher education qualification levels and describes the minimum level of achievement that a student should achieve to be eligible for an academic award at each level.</p>

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## The UK Quality Code for Higher Education

The Quality Code

The Quality Code is a series of documents put together by QAA, with input from universities, colleges and students across the UK. These documents are split into three Parts:

- Part A is about academic standards
- Part B is about learning opportunities
- Part C is about information about higher education provision.

The Quality Code sets out what everyone in the UK higher education sector expects of each other in those three areas.

The Quality Code applies to all students in UK higher education that is reviewed by QAA.

Each section of the Quality Code has an Expectation. This Expectation describes what all colleges and universities going through QAA review are required to show they meet.

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## Code of Governance

A set of principles and practices that support the effective governance of colleges or universities. These codes are developed to support members of the governing body in order to help them deliver the college or university's mission successfully. Different codes apply to different types of higher education organisation. Examples of such codes are the Higher Education Code of Governance by the Committee of University Chairs and The Code of Good Governance by the Association of Colleges.

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## Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met

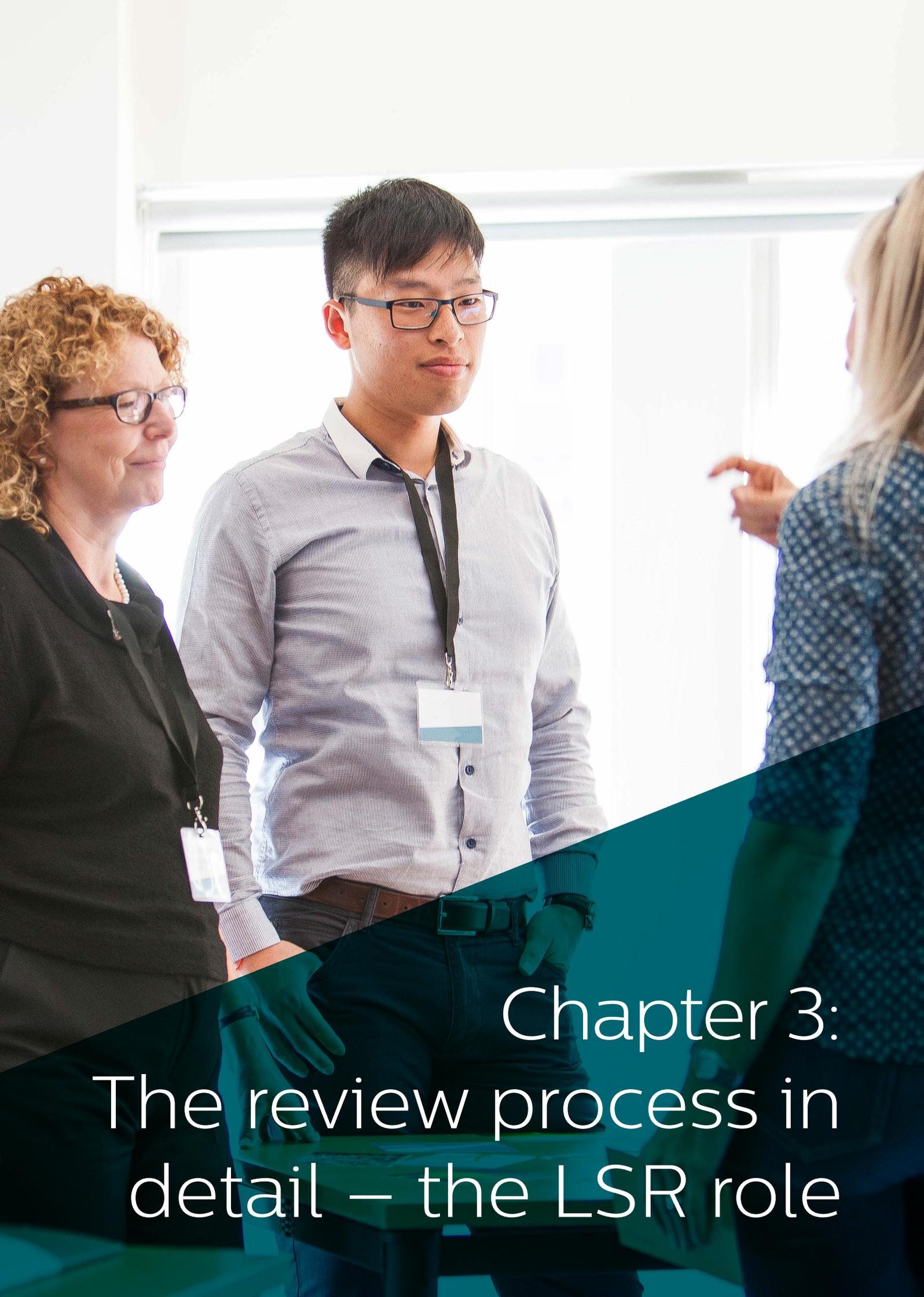
Students on higher education courses have consumer rights. This element of the baseline will look specifically at whether providers have policies and procedures in place to ensure that their obligations under consumer protection law are being met. The Competition and Markets Authority has published guidance that sets out its views on how consumer protection law applies to colleges and universities. This covers areas like clear, accurate and timely information, fair terms and conditions, and accessible, clear and fair complaints-handling processes and practices.

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## Student protection measures

Student protection measures are expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) good practice framework (England); the Principles of Good Administration (Northern Ireland) used by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO); and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures. These documents set out principles and operational good practice to protect students.

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Chapter 3:  
The review process in  
detail – the LSR role

In this section we're focusing on what your role is at each stage. We've included a checklist at the end of each section so that you can make sure you're on the right track.

## A – Before the on-site visit

### The briefing

At least six weeks before your on-site visit QAA will hold a briefing session on Quality Review Visit. The briefing session will either be virtual, or carried out face to face with just your college or university. The type of briefing you receive will depend on the needs of your college or university, as identified in the initial assessment. The Facilitator at your college or university will be given the details about the briefing, and will invite you to join it, regardless of whether the briefing is virtual or face to face.

Before you go to the session, make sure you watch the [briefing video](#), available on the QAA website, and pull out any questions you may have. The briefing will provide you with a chance to learn more details about the Quality Review Visit. It is a good idea for you to read through the online briefing materials before you come to the briefing, so that you can think about what you need further information about.

The briefing will include information specifically aimed at LSRs like you, such as information about the student submission and about how to choose students for the review team to meet during the on-site visit (more about this later on).

This is also a good opportunity to ask any questions about the student submission or any part of the review, before the review visit itself takes place. Remember, this isn't your only chance to ask questions; if you have any questions that you need answering before or after the briefing you can ask your Facilitator or your designated QAA specialist too!

### Your student submission

The Quality Review Visit method incorporates a student submission to tell the review team what it is like to be a student at your college or university. This student submission normally takes the form of a written document but it can be a video, presentation, or a combination of all! See Annex 2 at the back of this document for more information on alternative student submissions.

### Thought point

Fill in the key dates for your review in the table below. You should be able to find these out from your review briefing at QAA or from your Facilitator (your staff contact in your college or university).

Key milestone	Date	Notes
Review briefing at QAA		
Student submission due to be uploaded		
On-site review visit		
Draft report sent to my college or university		
Action Plan published		

## How do I begin to write the student submission?

There is no right or wrong answer in how to prepare a student submission. Our suggestion would be to first read through all the guidance and attend the QAA briefing. There are certain areas that the review team will be particularly interested in hearing about. These are things like the student academic experience, information and student protection measures – take a look at Annex 6 of the Quality Review Visit handbook for suggested areas you may want to include.

It's always best to base anything you say in the student submission on evidence. That way it isn't just your opinion that the student submission is based on. Have a look at any surveys or data from the previous years – do students feel particularly strongly about particular issues or areas?

Annex 3 contains some questions you might want to answer in preparing the student submission. Check that out for more ideas.

It would also be helpful if you speak to your college or university Facilitator who is working on their own submission. For example, if they talk about feedback on students' work in their own submission, you might also want to write about any survey results that show students' thoughts on the quality of feedback they receive.

## Where do I get the evidence to base all the information in the student submission on?

Using survey data and lots of student opinion is a great way to give your student submission credibility.

Your college or university will undoubtedly have lots of data collected over many years to gain student feedback.

Speak to your facilitator about any recent surveys of student opinion or staff-student committee reports, and so on. These shouldn't be too hard to come by as they will be using the same data to base their self-evaluation document on and they should be happy to share it with you.

Types of evidence could include:

- meeting minutes
- internal student feedback data
- course reps focus groups
- surveys
- opinion polls
- outcomes of Students' Union campaigns
- national Student Survey data
- postgraduate taught/research experience surveys
- any previous student submissions from previous reviews.

One good source of data is the Unistats website ([www.unistats.com](http://www.unistats.com)). This website contains a wealth of data, such as the outcomes of the National Student Survey, and information on completion rates and graduate outcomes and destinations, which you may wish to comment on in the student submission, or that might make a good source of evidence.

In Northern Ireland, students at further education colleges could refer to statistics published by the Department for the Economy ([www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-economic-research/further-education-statistics)).

## Who can help me?

So you've got a rough idea of what you plan on writing, but when it actually comes to putting pen to paper you're stuck. We suggest looking at Annex 3 of this guidance or Annex 6 of the Quality Review Visit handbook for some questions that might prompt you. Your college or university facilitator should also be able to help you.

### Thought point

Who are the key people you need to get involved in writing the student submission? Are they key people who will help? Should you ask for volunteers? Jot down your thoughts here.

### How long is this actually going to take me to write?

Each student submission is unique to each college or university and they can range from being two pages to 30 pages long depending on what you want to say. We can't set an absolute time or length, but would recommend not exceeding 30 pages, if you are using written format.

The only point we'd make is to ensure that it covers the main key areas of the Quality Review Visit as a minimum. There's no need to include unnecessary detail. Remember - less is more!

### Will the college or university want to read it?

Yes, they will most probably want to read the final student submission and may have a comment or two to make. They may also be able to offer guidance or additional evidence for certain points.

Your college or university should not be able to change the content of the student submission. This is a student-led document, and although it can be written with support of the staff, it should not be altered by them except for factual accuracy.

“ When I first showed my university the student submission, they had some really positive things to say. The staff were very keen to read it and hear the student side. They were able to provide me with some evidence I needed to back up my point about feedback on work and also helped me with the structure. There was one point that they didn't want me to include because they didn't feel it was in the scope of the review, but when I showed them the evidence and explained, they agreed it was important to incorporate it. So they didn't alter anything I'd said - just provided some helpful guidance and feedback. ”

Interview with Tom Chance, LSR, in 2013

### What if it says something the college or university doesn't like?

The student submission should be about the positives and the negatives of student opinion to present an all-round picture. This will mean that it may highlight something that your college or university may not like you to highlight. As long as you have the evidence to back up your point and it is relevant to the review areas, you have every right to include the point in question. Including ideas of how the negative may be overcome/addressed can also prove to be very helpful.

### Will other students want to see it before it is submitted?

Most probably – student reps especially. Lots of colleges and universities post their student submission online so all students can see what it is about. You don't have to, but it is a good way to show students their involvement and what the review is all about.

Any students who will meet the review team during the review visit should certainly be familiar with the student submission.

### How do I send the student submission to QAA when I've finished it?

Your college or university facilitator will upload the final document to QAA's secure site, which only the review team has access to.

### What will the review team actually do with the student submission?

The review team uses the student submission to gain student viewpoints on your college or university. For each point made, they will look at the evidence behind it. They'll also compare the student submission to the provider submission from your college or university.

The review team use what is written in the student submission as a base for areas to look at in more detail during the actual on-site visit. So, for example, if in your student submission you have said that all students are not happy with the access to libraries on campus, the review team will ask this question when meeting students on the review visit. This way, the review team gets the whole picture and doesn't just hear about something from one perspective.

## Checklist

Tick off the checklist to make sure you're on track and have achieved all you need to before the review begins.

- Watch QAA briefing video on QRV.
- Attend QAA briefing on review.
- Meet my university or college staff facilitator, ideally before the preparatory meeting.
- Have a basic understanding of the review process and what it involves.
- Make a plan for the student submission and collate any evidence needed.
- Let students know the review is happening, especially student reps.
- Share the final version of the student submission with the university or college facilitator to keep them informed and for them to upload to QAA's database.
- Share the student submission with the student body.
- Start to think about the next stage, the review visit itself.

## B – The on-site visit

By now your student submission should be uploaded safe and sound. Your college or university will have done the bulk of the work for the review and they will be preparing for the actual on-site visit itself. In this section, we will cover:

- briefing students
- the on-site meetings
- checklist so you can be sure you've done all you need to.

### Briefing students

#### Student reps

Student reps come in all shapes and sizes. A key part of your role is to keep students informed about the review and how they can feed into the process. Student reps are some of the key students who should know and be comfortable with QAA reviews. As LSR, it isn't possible for you to be everywhere and engage with every student. Student reps can help spread the message about the review and pass on any feedback. You could inform the wider student body about the review through a mass email, a factsheet on the Students' Union (or equivalent) website, or perhaps through the college or university intranet or virtual learning environment. You may allow students to send any comments, questions or concerns they may have to your student rep.

Using my student rep network was crucial to communicating all about the review. I couldn't be everywhere speaking to all students, so by educating my student reps, I made sure the message about the review was reaching more students. I made sure all my reps were made aware at the start of the academic year in our training for course reps. That was so they could all ask questions and hear the answers together. Student reps were invaluable to my role as LSR – I couldn't have done it without them!

Interview with Will Farron, LSR, in 2012

Make sure your student reps are fully in the know by working with your college or university to tell them all about QAA. Let them take a look at this guide for info. You can also provide your student reps with a copy of your student submission.

#### Thought point

Which key groups do you think will need to know about the review? How will you tell them? Jot down your thoughts here.

## The on-site visit meetings

As LSR you, alongside the staff facilitator, are one of the key people the review team may meet with more regularly throughout the on-site visit. The review team will be at your college or university for one, two or three days. You'll probably meet the review team a couple of times, if possible and depending on your studies, to answer any of their general questions and simply be the student rep. Sometimes the review team might have something specific for you, other times it will simply be a quick chat to make sure everyone is happy with the review progress. You'll be given a full on-site visit timetable well in advance so it will be clear exactly when you are expected to be around. Feel free to ask the review team any questions.

As LSR, it is your responsibility to select students to attend the on-site visit meetings. In the past, the college or university chose students to attend these meetings, but in the interests of fairness this responsibility has been passed on to the LSR.

You'll be given a time or a date for any meetings with students in advance.

### How do I go about choosing students?

Your first port of call should be those ever-trusty student reps! Send out an email to ask for volunteers to attend the meeting. The college or university might send this out on your behalf if you cannot email them directly.

### How many students will the review team want to meet?

It depends on the size of your college or university - usually up to about 10 students. If there are more than this it gets hard to ensure that everyone can have their say. However, the review team is always happy to speak to students, so if you have 12 really keen students, that's fine, but it is important that they are broadly representative of the higher education students at your college or university if possible.

### What sort of criteria should I take into account?

You should bear in mind that the review team will want to speak to a variety of students from across the college or university. For example, if you only have first-year students, it will be hard for the review team to gain a full picture of life for undergraduate and postgraduate students. When selecting students you should ensure a variety across:

- year of study
- degree course
- male and female
- postgraduate and undergraduate students (if applicable)
- international students
- student reps and non-student reps.

### Do I attend the student meeting?

Yes definitely!

### How do I prepare students for the meeting?

We recommend making sure students have a good understanding of the review process and their role in it. We would also recommend that they have seen the student submission and are familiar with it. It might also be helpful to remind them that QAA cannot deal with individual gripes about individual cases or individual members of staff.

This student meeting is kept private so individual comments will not be revealed to your college or university staff - students can speak in private knowing that everything is said in confidence.

### What will the review team ask students in the meeting?

Again, each meeting will be unique to each college or university so there is no definite answer. The review team members will introduce themselves and check that the students all know why they are there. They will also ask all the students to introduce themselves.

After this, the review team is likely to go into more detailed questions about topics to do with the student submission. For example, it might ask whether all the students are happy with the feedback on their work or that they know where to go if they wanted to make a complaint. It won't be anything scary, and remember, the discussions at meetings with the team are confidential – no information in the final report will identify individual students or their views, and those individual views won't be passed on to anyone else.

“ As LSR, I sat in on the student meeting with the review team. They were so friendly and made sure all students knew anything they said would be in confidence. They were also really careful to not use jargon or ask questions students wouldn't know the answer to. It felt more like a chat than an actual meeting. ”

Interview with Kerry Jones, LSR, in 2012

## Checklist

Tick off the checklist to make sure you're on track.

- Contact all students and student reps asking for volunteers to attend the review briefing.
- Brief all student reps on QAA review and ensure they have access to the student submission.
- Make sure the student meeting has a good variation of different types of students.
- Send the final list of chosen students to the university or college facilitator.
- Attend the review meetings as appropriate.

## C – After the on-site visit

The review team has been and gone in a whirlwind and there is a lull in review work from your college or university. They'll be waiting for the final report to be written by the review team and for the next steps. In this section, we will cover:

- the report and its outcomes
- action plan
- continuing on the good work after the review
- final checklist so you can be sure you've done all you need to.

### The report and its outcomes

#### What does the report actually do?

The report is a summary of all the review team has found throughout the review. The report is essentially the end product of all the work done by the college or university to demonstrate to the review team that they meet the relevant baseline requirements.

It includes a commentary on each section of the review and examples of evidence. Within the report the review team will highlight any identified developmental actions for your college or university, which are areas that your college or university will need to work on.

Crucially, the review team will provide two rounded judgements, which will state whether they consider that there can be confidence that:

1. academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK.
2. the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline requirements.

Your college or university can receive the following judgements for each of these areas.

- i. Confidence
- ii. Limited confidence requiring specific improvements before there can be confidence
- iii. No confidence at this time

#### What do the judgements actually mean? What happens if any outcomes are unsatisfactory?

The judgements are a quick way for anyone to see how your college or university has done in its review. Your college or university needs to get judgements of confidence for both areas to successfully complete its review.

If your college or university received limited confidence or no confidence judgements, they will undergo a programme of follow-up activity that might involve you, and they may choose to appeal the decision. It doesn't mean the college or university will be shut down. It doesn't mean that lectures will stop or that you'll notice any visible difference on campus. In reality, a failed judgement is serious but the follow-up activity after a failed judgement will mean that a college or university has a second chance to make improvements that ensure it does meet the required standards.

The judgements will further be used by the relevant funding body (HEFCE or DfENI) to make its broader judgement about your college or university's readiness, or not, to enter or stay part of the publicly funded higher education system.

### When will I see the report?

A draft copy of the report will be sent to your college or university within weeks of the on-site visit. This is so your college or university can make comments on factual accuracy. You should be given the opportunity to look at the report and make comments too. QAA will also send the draft report to you, but we expect you to provide feedback to the facilitator and one composite response to be sent back to QAA.

### When will the report be published?

The report will be sent to the relevant funding body five weeks after the on-site visit, if the review is successful, or up to 12 weeks after the on-site visit if there is an unsatisfactory judgement and your college or university decides to appeal. The report will then be published in coordination with HEFCE's or DfENI's broader judgement as part of the wider quality assessment process.

### Should I do anything with this report?

It's up to you. When it is published, your college or university will post it on their website, as will QAA. You might want to direct students to it. There will be certain sections of the report that are useful and relevant to students.

### Thought point

How will you share the outcomes of the review? Which students will want to know the outcomes? Jot down your thoughts here.

### Action plan

Your college or university may need to develop an action plan soon after QAA publishes the report: they should either do this jointly with you as student reps, or allow you to provide a commentary on the action plan.

### How can I gain feedback on the action plan?

You could collect opinions of groups of students about the suitability of recommended actions: for example, if a recommendation was made about the provision of placements, you might like to contact placement students to check that the suggested action will address the identified problem.

### Continuing on the good work

If you choose, the student submission can be the start of an ongoing process for your Students' Union (or its equivalent): it's a large piece of research that could kick-start a new campaign, or set objectives for the student body over the coming years. You could also produce an annual quality report following up on the issues raised in the student submission and showing what the college or university has done about them. This way, the review feeds into ongoing improvements within your college or university.

6 My university were really supportive of the student submission. So much so, that they wanted us to write one every year! We're going to use the student submission we used as a base, updating it each year to show progress. We're also going to expand it slightly to include non-academic areas. Hopefully this way we can have a solid base to build on next time a QAA review comes round.

Interview with Claire Holley, LSR, in 2013

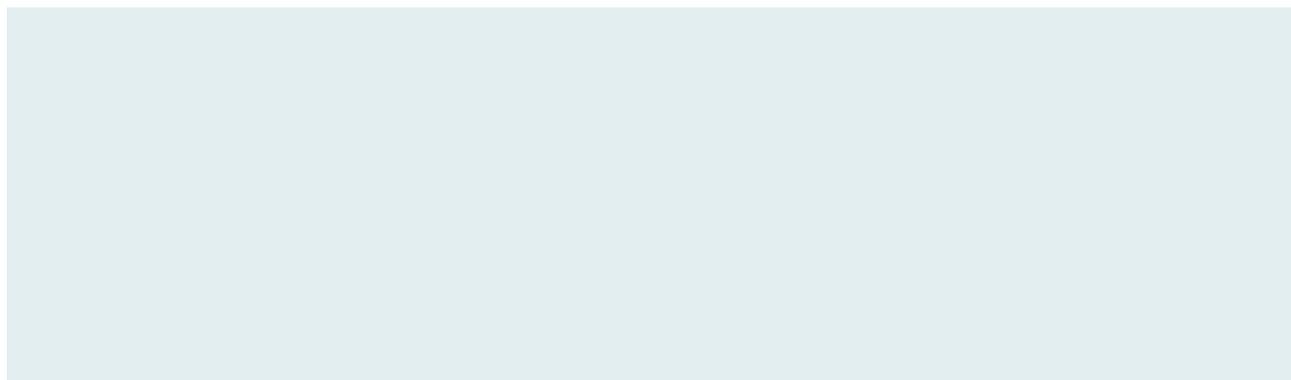
## Skills gained by being a LSR

There's an awful lot you can be proud of achieving by being a LSR - it's not an easy job! Make sure you are aware of some of the skills you will have undoubtedly gained throughout the process, such as:

- time management - a volunteer role on top of your degree can't be easy
- people management - organising all those students to attend meetings
- research, editing and writing skills - forget essays, the student submission takes the biscuit!

### Thought point

What other key skills do you think you developed through your role as LSR? Can you demonstrate them? Jot down your thoughts here.



## Final checklist

Congratulations - you've reached the end of a QAA review! Tick off the checklist below and give yourself a pat on the back.

- Read the draft report.
- Comment on the action plan and feed in any student feedback, where action is required.
- Make students aware of the final report and action plan.
- Pass on any work to future LSRs.



Annexes

# Annex 1: Ultimate jargon buster

## **Academic Quality** Quality

Academic quality is about how well the learning opportunities made available to students enable a student to achieve the level required. A college or university should be able to guarantee the quality of the learning opportunities it provides, although it can't guarantee any particular student's experience of these.

## **Academic standards** Standards/Threshold standards

The threshold standards are the minimum level of achievement that a student has to achieve to be eligible for an academic award (such as a bachelor's degree). These are described in *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). For example, this means that an engineering degree from one university reaches the same minimum level as it does in another university.

Academic standards are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain a specific academic qualification, which are set by the degree awarding body (such as a university). The academic standards they set for their qualifications may exceed the threshold standards.

## **Assurance**

The process for checking the standards and quality of the education provided against agreed benchmarks

## **Awarding body**

An organisation that awards an educational qualification, following formal assessment; this includes bodies that certify professional competence.

## **Code of Governance**

A set of principles and practices that support the effective governance of colleges or universities. These codes are developed to support members of the governing body in order to help them deliver the college or university's mission successfully.

Examples of such codes are the Higher Education Code of Governance by the Committee of University Chairs and The Code of Good Governance by the Association of Colleges.

## **Competition and Markets Authority guidance**

CMA guidance

Undergraduate students have consumer rights. CMA guidance sets out its views on how consumer protection law applies to colleges and universities. This covers areas like clear, accurate and timely information, fair terms and conditions, and accessible, clear and fair complaints-handling processes and practices.

## **Developmental period**

When a provider first enters the publicly funded system, after their first successful Quality Review Visit, they will enter a period of enhanced scrutiny with a further Quality Review Visit after four years. If successful, they will become established.

<b>Established</b>	A college or university is considered established if it has undergone two or more successful QAA reviews. Established colleges and universities will receive less intensive scrutiny but will be subject to intervention where necessary.
<b>Facilitator</b>	The lead contact at your college or university for the review process. Normally coordinates the self-evaluation document, organises the review visit and other meetings, and maintains regular contact with QAA and the LSR.
<b>Funding body</b>	These are the bodies in each of the devolved nations that distribute public money from the government to colleges and universities to fund teaching and research. In England the funding body is the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). In Northern Ireland the funding body is the Department for the Economy (DfENI).
<b>Gateway process</b>	The Gateway process is made up of a number of checks on colleges and universities, which wish to enter the publicly funded higher education system. In order to become 'established', colleges or universities that are new to the publicly funded higher education system will need to show that they meet certain requirements (the baseline regulatory requirements).
<b>Information</b> Information about learning opportunities	This is information about learning opportunities being available and accurate. This information is mostly for the public but includes current students, graduates and those responsible for quality assurance.
<b>Judgements</b>	<p>As part of Quality Review Visit the review team will provide two rounded judgements, which will state whether they consider that there can be confidence that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. academic standards are reliable, meet UK requirements, and are reasonably comparable with standards set and achieved in other providers in the UK</li> <li>2. the quality of the student academic experience meets baseline regulatory requirements.</li> </ol> <p>Your college or university can receive the following judgements for each of these areas.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i Confidence</li> <li>ii Limited confidence requiring specific improvements before there can be confidence</li> <li>iii No confidence at this time</li> </ol> <p>The funding body will consider the rounded judgements from the Quality Review Visit and the results of its own tests on the other baseline regulatory requirements to make a broader judgement about your college or university's readiness, or not, to enter or stay part of the publicly funded higher education system.</p>

<b>Lead student representative (LSR)</b>	Lead contact on behalf of the student body during the review process. Normally coordinates the student submission and facilitates student engagement with the review.
<b>Learning opportunities</b>	<p>Learning opportunities are everything a college or university provides in order to enable a student to achieve the level required to qualify for an award.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the teaching that students receive on their courses or programmes of study</li> <li>▪ the contribution students make to their own learning</li> <li>▪ the academic and personal support students receive, which enables them to progress through their courses</li> <li>▪ access to libraries</li> <li>▪ access to online resources or a virtual learning environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Peer review</b>	A process of review conducted by people with current or very recent experience of the activity being reviewed (in this case, providing or assessing higher education).
<b>Provider submission</b>	A document prepared by the college or university used as the starting point for review teams' investigations. It provides the college's perspective on its achievement against the baseline regulatory requirements.
<b>Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)</b>	An organisation that is independent of both government and universities/colleges. We report on quality assurance by visiting colleges and universities to review how well they are fulfilling their responsibilities. We also offer guidance on maintaining and improving standards and quality and on developing course delivery through the Quality Code.
<b>Student academic experience</b>	This refers to the learning experience of the students and how they are supported to progress and succeed. It includes the reliability of information published about what a student should expect of their learning experience.
<b>Student protection measures</b>	Student protection measures are expressed through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) good practice framework (England); the Principles of Good Administration (Northern Ireland) used by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO); and HEFCE's Statement of Good Practice on Higher Education Course Changes and Closures. These documents set out principles and operational good practice to protect students.
<b>Student submission</b>	A document prepared on behalf of the student body, usually overseen by the LSR. The student submission gives the students' perspective on how the college or university is meeting the baseline regulatory requirements.

## **The Baseline Regulatory Requirements**

### The Baseline

These are the areas that each college or university will be scrutinised against as part of the Gateway process. The following elements make up the baseline regulatory requirements:

1. *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)
2. The Expectations of the Quality Code
3. The relevant code of governance
4. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure consumer protection obligations are met
5. Student protection measures
6. Financial sustainability, management and governance
7. The college or university's mission and strategy

QAA will look at elements 1–5 as part of the Quality Review Visit, and the relevant funding body will separately look at elements 6–7.

Full details of the baseline requirements and further guidance can be found at: [www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment).

## ***The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland***

### FHEQ

A formal structure that identifies the national higher education qualification levels and describes the minimum level of achievement that a student should achieve to be eligible for an academic award at each level.

## **The UK Quality Code for Higher Education**

### The Quality Code

The Quality Code is a series of documents put together by QAA, with input from universities, colleges and students across the UK. These documents are split into three Parts:

- Part A is about academic standards
- Part B is about learning opportunities
- Part C is about information about higher education provision.

The Quality Code sets out what everyone in the UK higher education sector requires of each other in those three areas. The Quality Code applies to all students in UK higher education that is reviewed by QAA.

Each section of the Quality Code has an Expectation. This Expectation describes what all colleges and universities going through QAA review are required to show they meet.

## **Threshold standards**

The level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award. Threshold standards only describe the basic pass level: they do not relate to any individual degree classification in any particular subject (for example, a 2:1 in Physics). They dictate the standard required to be able to label an award 'bachelor's' or 'master's'.

## **Transition providers**

As the higher education system transitions to this new quality assessment model, universities and colleges, which were scheduled for QAA Higher Education Review (HER), and which have not already had two or more successful reviews by QAA in the past, will also receive a Quality Review Visit.

**Transnational  
education**

TNE

Transnational education, or TNE, refers to education that is delivered in a country that is different to where the awarding institution is based. For example, if a Greek college delivers qualifications awarded by an English college, in agreement with that college, or if a British university has a campus in Singapore.

Quality Review Visit looks at all programmes a college or university offers, even those delivered overseas. If your college has any TNE programmes you should aim to get input from students on those programmes for your student submission.

# Annex 2: Alternative student submissions

Each QAA review method incorporates a student submission to show the review team the student experience at that individual college or university. These student submissions are traditionally written and give the review team ideas for areas to look into during the review. QAA accepts that it may be easier and more accessible for student submissions to take another form such as a podcast, video or interviews. This guidance should provide clarity to those who wish to provide non-written student submissions for QAA reviews.

**Please note: This guidance is not the complete guide on how to write a student submission. This should be used in conjunction with the detail given earlier on in this guidance, which details evidence sources and student involvement.**

## General comments

Creating a non-written submission can be a great way of reflecting the particular experience at your provider, and might help in getting more students involved in the process. Remember, this is the key way that students' views will input into the review – it is important that it is effective for the review team to use. More detail can be found in the LSR guides for each method.

It might be useful to do this by also making use of a written supporting document, giving some of the background information it may be hard to present otherwise, such as evidence sources and details on the student body.

## Privacy

Remember that for all types of submission respecting participants' privacy is important. If you plan on sharing the submission with the wider student body ensure you check with those involved that they are happy for their video clip or sound bite to be published.

Remember also that the college or university will see the submission, so make sure your students are aware that their faces will be seen. While it is unlikely that the staff who see the submission will be able to identify students by their face, it is not impossible and students should therefore be made aware.

Please also bear in mind that some students may want to remain anonymous while still getting their views heard. You can do this with careful filming to avoid identifying the student, making use of podcasts, or by using any written supporting document to air their views.

## Video submissions

Video submissions can be an excellent way of showing review teams in a very immediate way what students think about their provider. They can also be confusing and hard to follow if they are not clearly recorded with audible vocals, a clear structure, and content that is relevant to the review. It is therefore important that they have some form of introduction setting out relevant background information that enables the review team to understand what they are about to see. This would be a good point to include information about who has been involved in the submission, which students it doesn't cover, and where the evidence the review team is about to see has come from.

The review team will not find useful a video tour of your campus or simply filming a single focus group without any conclusions. If you do film focus groups or interviews with students as part of your submission, then make sure you explain how they have been put together, who was involved and what the conclusions were across all the focus groups and interviews. Perhaps consider backing these up with other evidence and using clips to emphasise points. For example, if you want to show that students are happy that their feedback is acted upon, find some statistics that show this (such as from the National Student Survey), and then

have some clips of students to back it up. Remember, you can use some written evidence to help with this.

If your college or university has students involved in film or media production, they may want to get them involved in producing the student submission. But remember – you and your provider are not being judged on your film production skills! The most important thing is to ensure that review teams get a clear understanding of the issues you are raising, and that they can see that there is clear evidence.

In terms of video format, you can submit the video file and the supporting document in the same folder when uploading it to the secure electronic site. We would strongly prefer the video to be in a format compatible with Windows Media Player to keep things consistent for the review team, so either .wmv/.avi/.wmd/.wav. The maximum file size is 80MB, with a maximum duration of one hour.

### **Podcast submissions**

Podcast or sound bite student submissions should follow similar principles to the video submissions. Podcasts can be particularly useful for capturing the views of students who do not want to be on camera, but you must pay particular attention to ensure that audio levels are appropriate and that it is clear to the listener what they are listening to.

The review team will not find interviews with individual students useful if they don't have any conclusions. As with video submission, we recommend that if you record students talking you should back these up with other evidence. For example, if you want to show that students are concerned about their access to the libraries, find some statistics that show this and then have some sound clips of students to back it up. Remember you can use some written evidence to help with this.

To keep things consistent for the review team, podcast or sound bite submissions should take the format of either .wmv/.avi/.mp3/.wav or CD file and be no longer than one hour.

### **Presentations**

Artwork or other presentations can provide a much more visual representation of students' views. Again, you may want to get art or design students involved in the making of this presentation. You could present an infographic cover of the written report, including a visual representation of key statistics or comments. It's up to you! Just remember your student submission should meet the key criteria in the general comments above. These submissions should be sent as a .pdf file.

### **Uploading**

All submissions should be uploaded to the Review Extranet (SharePoint) site. Your university/college contact will coordinate the upload. You may wish to send us hard copies, for example CDs. Please clearly label these and provide adequate copies for the whole review team (roughly four copies).

# Annex 3: Optional template for Student Submission

Please note, this template is optional and is only meant to provide assistance as to the suggested content for each section. It is not a cover-all guide and should not be treated as such. Remember, each college or university is unique and therefore not all the questions here will be relevant. Equally, you may wish to talk about other areas. The questions listed below are merely meant to be a prompt.

## Introduction

This is your chance to introduce your submission and talk about how it was compiled.

- How many students were involved?
- How did you gather students' views?
- Who prepared and authored the student submission?
- What was the involvement/support you had from your university/college?
- How did you get final approval from the student body?
- If you have previously had a QAA review, how have things progressed since then?
- How were students involved in any changes?
- What is your relationship like with your university/college?
- What services does the student representative body provide?

## Questions to consider

It is not compulsory to provide an answer for each of these areas – some might not be relevant to your university/college. Instead, these are prompts to help you organise your thoughts and give the review team a useful understanding of students' perceptions in these areas. The review team will not find simple 'yes/no' answers useful. Remember, you can answer all of the questions, just some of them, or add your own.

- Do students see assessment as getting more challenging as they progress through their course?
- Do students have access to external examiner reports?
- Do students feel that their assessments are appropriate?
- Do students feel that their feedback is timely and helpful?
- Do students understand grading criteria?
- Are students aware of the university/college rules on plagiarism?
- How are students involved in the design of new programmes?
- Do students feel that the staff are fully trained and qualified?
- Have students had the opportunity to feed back on lectures?
- Do students see evidence of a link between research undertaken by lecturers and the content of the modules?
- Do students believe that the learning resources are adequate?
- How are students involved in quality assurance processes at all levels?
- How effective is student representation? How are students supported?
- Are there any case studies where the university/college has instigated a change in response to students' views?
- How does the university use evidence such as the National Student Survey scores to enhance its provision?
- How do students find out about complaints and appeals procedures?

- How satisfied are students with the outcome and timescales of the above procedures?
- How is employability embedded in the curriculum for students?
- How satisfied are students with any careers service provided?
- How satisfied are disabled students?
- How satisfied are international students? What welcome do they get from the university/college?
- How useful is the university/college online provision?
- How satisfied are students who undertake work placements?
- Does your university/college have a document (student charter) that sets out mutual expectations? Are students aware of this?
- How does the university/college listen to the student voice when considering enhancement?
- How are students made aware of any changes or improvements to their educational experience?
- Are students aware of an ethos of continual improvement in the university/college?
- How user-friendly and up to date is the website/information provided to students?
- Is it accurate?
- What language support do international students get?

### **Conclusion**

- Briefly summarise the key student views.
- How has the student submission been shared with fellow students?
- Summarise any recommendations you would like to make.

If you are stuck with anything, please don't hesitate to get in touch - either by contacting your Quality Specialist or via any of the contact methods listed below.

For further information, please refer to the Quality Review Visit handbook:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=3191](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication/?PubID=3191).

If you've enjoyed being an LSR, we've always got lots going on at QAA that involves students. You could become a student reviewer, sit on our Student Advisory Board or attend one of our events - take your pick! For more information go to:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students).

Contact us:



[www.qaa.ac.uk/contact-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/contact-us)



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[www.youtube.com/qaatube](http://www.youtube.com/qaatube)



[www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/students)

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